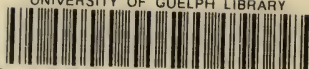


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MACDONALD, ALEXANDER, 1801-

A JUMBLE OF JOTTINGS FROM THE  
MEMORIES OF A QUIET LIFE

2004

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11 A JUMBLE  
OF JOTTINGS //

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*FROM THE MEMORIES OF  
A QUIET LIFE*

ABERDEEN  
A. BROWN & Co.

1894

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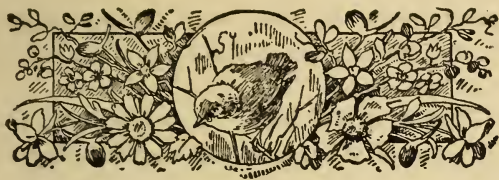
## NOTE.

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*The writer of the following Jottings—  
—an Advocate of standing in the city—  
unfortunately did not begin writing his  
recollections soon enough, his death cutting  
short the record when little more than  
begun. They are published in the hope that  
though fragmentary, they will be of interest  
to lovers of Bon-Accord.*







## A Jumble of Jottings.

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SIXTY-FIVE years, my masters, is a long look backwards into the vista of one's life, and where (as in this case) memory alone is to be relied on for a record of the events connected with it, the narrative cannot be otherwise than desultory and meagre. Desultory it is, in sober truth, intended to be—meagre it must of necessity be from the circumstance of the life being in itself an uneventful one. Indeed, what I have here called a record will have no real pretensions to the title of narrative, as it will be simply made to operate as a convenient *quasi file* whereon may be “at random strung” those fitful

recollections of men and things, which, coming like foregone shadows might otherwise "so depart."

First as to my birth. I was born in the Shiprow of Aberdeen, on the 8th day of July, 1801. Of the locality—if little was to be said then, still less is it the subject of laudation now. It is the St. Giles of the Granite City, bounded on one side by the "back traps," on the other by the local Billingsgate, or Fish Market. Of "ancient and fish like smells" it has therefore no lack. But "*teneat risum*"! was it not "over against" my humble place of nativity that the chief magistrate of the city had his private domicile, James Hadden, Esq., to wit, the most dignified Provost the Burgh ever had. In confirmation of this, one only requires a glance at his portrait in the town-hall.

Time, however, that *edax rerum*, has remorselessly swallowed up all that was elegant and stylish in those once "gay and festive halls." The "dazzling light," due to an unlimited quantity of moulds and dips, for gas had not then (though dreamt of) been invented, has not only suffered a total eclipse, but the halls themselves, once

resonant with the tread of "light fantastic toes," are now crammed to the ceiling with cheese, herrings, fruit, and other miscellanies, the extensive stock in trade of Mr. J. J. Kennedy.

When arrived at the age (I suppose) of seven or eight, I began to look about me on my own private account. Well do I recollect standing about that time on St. Catherine's Hill and casting my eyes abroad over huge mounds of earth which were rapidly being levelled in the formation of Union Street. Where is St. Catherine's Hill now, one may well ask? What little remains of it is hid by the Adelphi Court, which did not then exist. It may yet be seen, however, by entering the pen which leads to the office of C. & W. Stewart.

From about this period may be dated the gradual disappearance along the line of street just named, of old suburban houses, summer gardens, and field lanes, and the absorption of their sites into one of the most handsome streets to be found in any city. It may be sufficient here to mention, that most of the space from Bon-Accord Street to Union Place, now covered by residences of the class A1, was in my

boyhood the extensive and well stocked gardens of honest John Boigni, much resorted to during the fruit season by the middling-to-do citizens. Several of the trees, and those probably the best, are yet preserved in the gardens (behind the houses) abutting on Langstane Place.

At the time I first went to school, at the foot of the Hangman's Brae, under the mild domination of Miss Peggie Thomson, the great bogle of the day was "Bonny-pairtie." His effigy, stuffed with straw, made its regular appearance on the 4th of June (the King's birthday), amidst showers of squibs and crackers, and suffered incrimination in fellowship with the effigy of John Booth, the proprietor of the *Chronicle*, on the oft recurring occasions of popular rejoicing during our Peninsular campaigns, and up indeed to Waterloo. Dr. Ker, the editor, was a decided Bonapartist, and did not shrink from standing out in the very boldest relief from what he knew to be the all but universal opinion. Their vicarious punishment was distasteful neither to Johnny, nor to him. They enjoyed themselves at their own bonfire as much as the barest legged "midden boy," or "Green

Lintie," a clan of city arabs who were never known to be absent from stirring scenes like these.

Foreign languages, at this time, were, for the most part, taught by French refugees, men of the old regime, whose conduct generally was beyond reproach. Occasionally a French prisoner would pass through the town, bound (literally so) for Edinburgh Castle, but more frequently a red wafered letter would be put by the postman into the hands of a seaman's wife, dated "the Ponteneuse," or some other prison in the territory of the great Ogre. Such a one did my own mother receive from my father, announcing his having been taken by a French privateer, and placed in durance vile on uncommonly short commons. He managed to escape, however, reaching the Isle of Wight in an open boat.

In the winter of 1809 a general demonstration by way of rejoicing took place, which, from its nature, was calculated to lay strong hold on my memory. It was on the occasion of His Majesty George the III. attaining his fiftieth year, and was called "the Jubilee." Elevated on the shoulders of some accommodating friend,

I beheld the fireworks exhibited on the Cross, with feelings of mingled wonder and delight. Many a contemporaneous event has clean faded from my memory. Not so that brain exciting blaze, which seems to have left behind it a mark as clearly defined as if it had been an event of yesterday.

Shortly afterwards, I think, the local Militia was embodied, a great boon to us youngsters. Each had his favourite corps. Some patronized Colonel Tower, others Colonel Finlayson. During three weeks in summer they met nightly on the Links, each with its band, and with a wide interval of space between them. The expenditure of blank cartridge was something to remember. The County Militia was meanwhile doing garrison duty in some other portion of the United Kingdom, and continued to do so till the termination of the war. The Barrack was also, at parade time, a place of great resort for the boys, and children too of a larger growth, for the sake of the music. There was a guard-house on Castle Street, where Daniel the printer's shop now stands, and the drums were beat

between the Barrack and that nightly at eight o'clock. The shrill sound of the fife in fact was almost constantly in our ears, and to remind us further that we were in the midst of war, wooden legs and armless sleeves were rendered familiar objects. Of the Battery Company I can't say much. It was rather before my time, but the doings of it then, and for a long time afterwards, formed a never-failing source of popular amusement. A privateer would now and then pop round the Girdleness, and quietly walk off with a full cargoes vessel ; rounding the Ness once more, but in a opposite direction, just as Captain Gibbon's Corps came within sight at the double. The guns were then fired with a courage and determination uncharitably attributed by the non-combatant onlookers to the welcome conviction, on the part of the combatants, that the enemy, like the Irishman's covey, had "left that at any rate." The disgust of the captured crew may be easily imagined.

So lucrative a trade became privateering at last, that the vessels of the Aberdeen and London Shipping Company (smacks at that period of Bridlington build) were

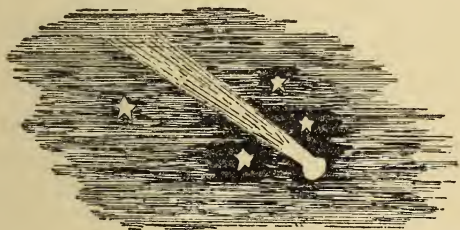


“armed by government”—six carronades a side, with lots of grape and cannister, which I have often seen and handled. This took the conceit a little out of the Frenchmen, as two or three attempts afterwards they met with an unexpected and crippling repulse. Where all this time were our own cruisers? Not idle as I can personally testify, and may possibly narrate hereafter.

I have already spoken of a pyrotechnic display which took a strong hold on my memory. What I then beheld was *in itself* of an evanescent character. In the year 1811, the public eye, “the eyes of Europe,” and half the world besides, were directed nightly to an object in the firmament which was beheld by my individual self with feelings of profound awe. This was no flare-up like the jubilee demonstration, resplendent for a time, and then fading into darkness, but a mysterious visitant of portentous aspect, at first indistinct and not readily distinguished from its twinkling neighbours, but as night after night wore on, at length assuming an appearance, which, I for one, can never forget. I have seen comets since, and some of



them well defined, but their effect on the beholder, as my own observation satisfied me, was of a very different kind from that produced by what the "folks of Fittie" called the "Comma-tee Starn." Some of them likened it to a "reed-het poker," which was no bad simile, for red and fiery it was, and in shape not unlike an exaggerated kitchen poker (tail of course predominant) in a state of red-heat. I can even now recall it as seen from the harbour a little to the eastward of the Broad Hill. This was about the figure of it, and it did not require



to be looked for, no more than would its quiet neighbour the moon, a thing which cannot be said of any comets I have seen since.

Close on this followed a mania for air balloons, which seemed to bother as much

as the "Starn," the primitive people of Fittie and Torry.

"Odd himsel', Nanny, fats that noo"? "An' airy 'loon, Kirsty! Professor Coup-land again."

"Deil coup's 'eed o'ers 'eels, he winna leave an 'addock o' the coast, or a reed-tiled hoose in a' Torry."

This was long an anecdote in most boys' mouths, altho' in its *sequitur* or logic not very intelligible.

At Mr. Falconer's school in Drum's Lane, I went through a long course of preparation for the Grammar School. While here I acquired a taste for reading, which, "growing with what it fed on," has continued up to the present time to be my favourite pastime. Few incidents of that period occur to my memory. One afternoon about three o'clock, while about, with other boys, to enter Drum's Lane, we were startled by a loud explosion in the direction of Schoolhill. It turned out to be the apotheosis of poor Baillie Farquharson, who was blown out of his own close-head in Schoolhill, as Provost More was approaching it to take an early dinner with him. The old story, a barrel of gunpowder and a spark from a candle.

Gunpowder in these days was handled by dealers much in the same free and easy way as if it had been turnip or onion seed. Hoggie Geordie, for instance, who kept a small shop at the extreme corner of Castle Street as it turned into Castle Brae, kept his in *a drawer*, and had smoking been as common then as it is now, his life would not have been worth a week's purchase. As it was, he had to keep a constant eye on the drawer, for it was a standing joke with us, while a confederate was getting weighed out a "bawbee's worth o' poother," to send a cracker into the shop, for the miserable purpose of seeing George hop over the counter in pursuit of our emissary, who was always on these occasions prepared for flight. His mode of curing this evil, however, was both ingenious and effective. Having matured his plans, he, on one occasion, at the very moment when the projectile came whizzing into the shop, collared the intending purchaser, dragged him behind the counter, and held him down on a stool with his head over the open drawer, the sparks all the time flying about at random. His howl of horror was music to George's ear, conscious as he was

that his victim could not, in his then state of mind, distinguish very nicely between gunpowder and powdered charcoal. His companions hearing it, fled in the utmost terror, expecting the blow-up to occur every second, and never was a parting kick received with greater thankfulness than it was by the captive, when liberated by his chuckling enemy. The result was that George was ever after spoken of as "the anti-combustible man-salamander," and invested with that attribute, he was no more molested.

People of the present day would naturally ask what were the police about all this time? To which the answer is, that the police, like the locomotive, had not then been invented. There was Simon Grant to be sure, and Geordie Turriff, and other red-coated hangers-on at the Town House door. These, as the Town Sergeants, were the sole conservators of the public safety by day, and at night a lot of sentry boxes distributed through the town were occupied by a set of old men, unfit for aught else, whose duty it was to call the hours and half-hours, adding their own private opinion as to the state of the weather. They

carried lanterns and rattles, a merciful provision for the protection of roughs and roysterers, who, seeing the one, or hearing the other, were timeously warned of a risk of collision, ending in the watch-house. The consequence was, they were rather favourites than otherwise, these "Charlies," and it was generally allowed to be a great shame to upset their boxes, as was not unfrequently done in the very midst of their hard-earned "forty winks." But the place that once knew them, knows them no more for ever.

Among the many changes I will have constantly to chronicle, none has been more remarkable, more thorough and sweeping, than the introduction of the new police, the repression of street begging, and the housing of street "objects." Such objects the present generation can have but the faintest idea of. Feel Peter, Jupiter Johnny, the Bawbee Boy, Mourican, Feel Willie Milne, Buttery Willie Collie, Jean Carr, Jock o' Wagley, General Brown, Willie Goodman—these were all free to roam where'er they liked, entering houses and shops *ad libitum*. They were an institution in which the boys claimed to have

as much of a vested interest as they had in boots, buttons, or tops, only the latter had their seasons, while the former were perennial.

On our way to or from school, Jupiter Johnny was a sure card, and being of an irritable temper he afforded many a "fine run." From Jean Carr we fled in the wildest disorder, never looking behind, she was such a gruesome spectre ; but "Mourican," a Swedish sailor, who had been shipwrecked on the coast, and became bereft of reason, was generally put through his facings, consisting of sundry contortions and demands for "room," the only word he could utter. At first it was "Mourican room" (American rum), at least such was the interpretation put on it. He came ashore about Donmouth, and was long a troglodyte in the woods of Parkhill. Of "General Brown" we had only occasional glimpses when he was in grand military efflorescence at the head of a regiment. When it marched out of barracks his place was immediately in front of the drum-major, whom, singularly enough, he was permitted to eclipse. His equipment was a most ludicrous burlesque on that of a field officer—his epaulettes, to

make up for their being red worsted, being twice the usual size. In some fight or other they had made an "unco sair hash" of him, and with his remaining eye protruding from about the middle of his face, (a veritable Cyclops) his appearance was always hailed with mingled cheers and laughter, destructive, one would of thought, of all military discipline. Yet he was protected, as well as tolerated, by regiments who afterwards left half their numbers on the field of Waterloo.

To those resident, like myself, in the vicinity of the harbour, the almost invariable stroll after school hours was to the pier or the sands, the route generally taken being past the building yards by a road formed from the harbour beach; the Waterloo Quay not being then in existence, nor a vestige of York Street. On one of these occasions I recollect seeing a curious, and to me, novel operation on a ship in the course of performance. It was that of cutting her in two, for the purpose of adding to her length, by the insertion of a middle portion. The vessels name was the "Oscar," and she was then a large brig. She left



the stocks, however, a still larger *ship*, but for a brief and doomed career. At dawn of the memorable morning of 1st April, 1813, she left the harbour with other vessels for the Greenland fishery, the weather giving then no indication of what subsequently occurred. I was hurrying to school as usual, before eight o'clock, up the Hangman's Brae, through a fearful gale of wind, accompanied by sleet, when I was met by string after string of half-frantic fisherwomen, rushing down the brae in the direction of the pier. I soon learned that a dire disaster had occurred in the bay, the particulars of which have so often been detailed, that I need not record them here. When I got down to the pier I saw the "St. Andrew's" whaler amongst the breakers at the back of it, but the "Oscar" was not to be seen. Next day I saw part of her hull, bottom up, on the rocks near the Bay of Nigg. During the next few days I saw boatload after boatload of the bodies of the crew brought up to the harbour to be claimed by their friends, and a sad sight it was. I remember vividly the shock I got by recognising Captain Innes as he lay wrapped in a sail on the sugar-house steps,



one hand grasping a bit of sea ware, the melancholy evidence of a strong man's expiring struggle.

Previous to this I had been a voyage to Leith in my father's vessel, and spent most of my time in Edinburgh in the deep enjoyment of many novel sensations. All I recollect now is seeing the funeral procession of Lord President Dundas from Mrs. Guthrie Wright's window, nearly opposite the Tron, and hearing at same time of the sudden death of Lord Melville.

My career at the Grammar School was rather a successful one ; altho' under a most eccentric teacher, Mr. Watt, I had, or perhaps took, too much of my own way. He was a good classical scholar, but of uncouth exterior, which was no way improved by a habit he had of chewing tobacco. If he was liberal of the "tards," he had good occasion, for the practical jokes played upon him would have uncanonized a saint. Fancy his coming to school on a very cold morning, and on commencing to stir the fire, as was invariably his wont, finding the knob of the poker adhere to his hand, until a flourish

over his head sent it, and some inches of skin, crashing through the window. "Some blackguard has done it," was all he said at the time. A week or two afterwards, when his hand became capable of wielding the leather, he electrified us boys by giving us five minutes to give up the culprit. Failing our doing so, we were not to be indulged with the letters of decimation, but were each, in his own proper person, to dree the doom, a round half-dozen of pandies, and dree it we did—properly too, for we were all in the plot together, actors, or "art and part." Somehow or other, we contrived to get as much Latin crammed into us as afforded the necessary qualification for our entry into College. My entry was made in the memorable year when Waterloo was fought. Well do I remember the reading by Geordie Turriff on the Tolbooth stair, of the identical *Gazette* account of the great battle and victory, represented in the "Chelsea Pensioners" by Wilkie. It was a joyous day for most of us—not for all. Poor Mrs. Kynoch, for one, had to mourn the loss of her husband, Adjutant Kynoch, killed at the very close of the battle,

As a Bageant at Marischal College I studied Greek under Professor Stuart. He had the sobriquet attached to him of "Stumpy Stuart," from his having a wooden or cork leg. He was nothing remarkable as a Grecian, but had he been a Porson or Burney it would have been pretty much the same, so far as regarded the successful teaching of a class like ours. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*. Our scarlet gowns, resplendent for the first few weeks because jealously cared for, by slow but sure degrees became ragged and sleeveless, the latter because in the class to class combats, the sleeves became necessary when converted, with the aid of tarred twine, into formidable colts, as offensive weapons. One day, however, a general order was issued that all should appear in the public school with gown sleeves attached. I shall never forget the consternation this order created, as the pecuniary penalty for non-performance was equivalent to what would now be a fiat in bankruptcy. Every imaginable effort was made, with the aid of sisters, and occasionally mothers, to restore the twisted sleeves to something approximating to their normal condition, but alas, the tarry twine (what

could have possessed us to use such a material) had imprinted for itself an inscription as legible as the Runic characters they were said to resemble, which bade equal defiance to soft soap, the flat-iron, and the mangle. The exhibition ought to have resulted in shouts of laughter, but somehow it didn't. At all events none of us "laughed in our sleeve," or out of it, on this particular occasion.

Notable among the professors at this time was the venerable Dr. Hamilton, the author of the book on the "National Debt," which got him the thanks of Parliament, and nearly turned his head. Figurative of that at all events, he came into the public hall on the morning the news came with the back of his wig before. Losing control of his class, he was succeeded by Professor Cruickshank, now a retired citizen of Aberdeen, after thirty years successful teaching. His branch was mathematics. Professor Copland was long unapproachable in his wide and interesting field of Natural Philosophy. Steam was then in its infancy, electricity little better, and his experiments in both were conducted in such a style as to carry the sensation to

us students that we were constantly "under fire." When we seemed to want enlivening he made us join hands, and sent a shock through the class. When we threatened to get *too* lively, he added a few extra peats to the steam engine boiler, which hissed and sputtered on the table before us, and shut down the valve with the grim remark that this "beautiful contrivance" was all that protected us from ———. Here he gave a shudder, and tried to raise the valve, almost immediately exclaiming, "William must have been tampering with this"; but seeing that a general rush to the doors had all but commenced, he promptly added, "Oh, here it comes, now the danger ceases." With the sigh of relief that followed, all larking ceased for the remainder of the day. It was always kept by the boys in wholesome remembrance, that a former college porter had, in the performance of kindred experiments, been, as the Yankees express it, "used up." In pumping into the barrel of an air gun, he had put in "the atmosphere" too much, which, as the extra strain did to the barrel, broke his back. Consequently volunteers for service of this sort were nowhere in our time.

The Professor came out strong on the occasion of his friend and patron, the last Duke of Gordon, being installed with military honours as Chancellor of the University. Our march up from the New Inn to the College Hall, escorted by the troops, and headed by their band of music, made heroes of us in our own eyes then and for ever. Waterloo had just been fought.

Shortly afterwards, that is in 1816, I took a trip with my eldest sister across to Rotterdam, in my father's vessel the "Rotterdam Packet." Entering the Maas by Helvoet-Sluis, sights and objects met my eyes, producing on me an impression that I had somehow been translated into a new state of existence. On approaching the Dutch coasts, spires, towers, and wind-mills appeared growing out of the water, land being no apparent ingredient in what was really a landscape. By and bye schuits, luggers, doggers, etc., came splashing down the rapid outgoing tide of a broad and deep river, most of them steered by a "Vrow," conspicuous at the stern by head gear of the shape and size of a round straw door mat; handy very (as we

afterwards found) from being convertible, when simply folded, into a capacious market basket. Sailing, or rather drifting up the river as the tide permitted, we at last found ourselves in the interior of Rotterdam, moored opposite some merchants' shops in the Leuvre Haven, where the vessel continued to lie, and we to occupy the cabin, for the next three months.

One morning early I recollect a voice calling down the cabin stairs, "Hoist your colours." "What for?" was the rejoinder. "Anniversary of the battle of Waterloo." "Oh! all right." On the Boompjes facing the river, I witnessed, same day, a review of the Dutch troops, remarkable to me only from the rear being occupied by any quantity of vivandieres, on whom the demand for *schnaaps* was fully as regular as the *feu-de-joie* that followed. The Dutch hatred to Bonaparte and his dynasty seemed to be yet unabated. The eagle still held its place over his temporary residence, but it had a caged appearance. The "cherry wivies"—oh, what a lot—sang noisy ballads on their joyful riddance of their French invaders, of whom it is said



they killed hundreds at the time of the explosion. The quantity of doits and stivers I expended on cherries must have been something great, since it absorbed my whole pocket money, and left nothing for the acquirement of those endless curiosities, which so sorely tempted me during the time of the Keremis or Annual Fair. But the unfailing good nature of the Governor came to the rescue, and I came home laden with a more varied collection certainly than \*Adam's "box of green spectacles," but of a not much greater intrinsic value. My intercourse with Jew hawker boys became inconveniently intimate, and thereby (I presume) I was led to visit the Jews' Synagogue, receiving, by way of encouragement, a rap over the knuckles for taking off my hat. I was accompanied by two of the sailors, whose "foc'sle-head" remarks, more loud than deep, ultimately led to our ignominious expulsion. In contrast to this, was my visit to the "Groot Kirke," a cathedral of St. Lawrence. It was during time of service also, and we had an opportunity therefore of hearing the great organ. It is the only occasion on which it may be said

\**Query*—Moses.



I had gone to *see* the singing. What you *beheld* was the outstretched throats, and widely distended mouths of the vocally devout boors—what you *heard* was simply peal after peal of thunder from the organ, rendering one man's attempt at singing quite as good as anothers.

On ascending the large square tower (which appears often in Dutch paintings) the scene which presents itself is unmistakably unique. A lot of land chopped up, for many miles of a dead flat and swimming apparently in about an equal quantity of water, is not the sight one usually gets in a bird's-eye view. Here popped up Haarlem, there Dordt, on another lump Gouda, and below, the city lay also under water, or the next thing to it (for a very little "undamming" would produce that result) most streets being canals with shipping at the peoples' doors. Talking of that, we did not neglect to pay a visit to Schiedam, nor to taste at the fountain head its far-famed produce. My own tippie was usually confined to aniseed water, a pleasant, but not particularly elevating decoction. I went in for smoking, seeing that every man and boy made

it part, and a principal one, of their daily business, but my pipe was soon put out, and laid quietly on the shelf. Cigars tipped with straws had only just come in.

Our church on the Scotchen Dyke, presided over by "Dominies" McPhail and Anderson, still exists in full vigour, and the congregation, in point of numbers, was rather surprising to see at that period. The foot-stools of the ladies, with live peats to keep out the all prevailing damp, attracted my attention most. Provost Young, late of Aberdeen, with his beautiful and amiable lady (a daughter of the Commissary Fordyce of Culsh) was our most intimate friend and patron, but besides these, we were constant visitors of the Martins of Nellfield, and their relations the Gibson family on the Boompjes, as well as the Hills, Fergusons, and a host of others, not forgetting our constant attendant John Smith, now a denizen of Aberdeen, and generally distinguished from others of the same name, as "Rotterdam John." His dinner table anecdotes furnished to my sister and myself a source of the most hilarious laughter, and it was almost a matter of grave surprise to me,

therefore, when meeting him at Braemar, almost half a century after, I failed to detect on his visage the perennial grin, which added so much to the humour of his narrative. Alas, poor Yorick!

With Erasmus' colloquies still pretty fresh in my memory, it was with no common interest that I looked up upon the bronze statue of Erasmus in the Groot Market. I well recollect the indignation at what I felt to be a sacrilege on the part of the Dutch boys, their keeping a dépôt of stones for fighting purposes on his outspread book. *Oh mi Erasme*, thought I, is this all the good your colloquies have done in your native town.

I have mentioned the Keremis. It was an extraordinary affair, pervading the whole town in the shape of wooden erections for the sale of toys and eatables, cheap jewellery, pipes, skates, snuff boxes, waffelkies, etc., etc., while a continual stream of wandering minstrels, jugglers, etc., kept pouring through the streets; and this continued for at least a fortnight, culminating each night, Sunday more particularly, in a general *set to*, not as practised in English and Irish fairs, but

of that grotesque style of dancing, seen in the pictures of Jan Stern and others, the music being generally as miscellaneous as the company, but in the main good.

We left Holland by the Brill, another mouth of the Maas, and very speedily encountered a very heavy gale, at least so we considered it, which lengthened our voyage more than ten days, but glad we were at all events to reach home at any price. Whatever fancy I might previously have had for the sea, owes its utter extinction to that equinoctial gale. I returned to my studies with meek resignation.

In the following year I entered, as an apprentice, the office of Mr. James Blaikie of Craigiebuckler, Advocate, and afterwards Provost of Aberdeen, one of the most agreeable, even tempered, and intelligent men it was my lot to meet with. His kindness to myself personally, was such as to call for my warmest expression of grateful recollection. Associated with him in partnership was Mr. Patrick Bannerman, also a generous, good hearted man, who devoted much of his time to the Italian classics, and took little, if any, concern in

the business of the office. To myself he was ever specially kind, and it was a melancholy duty I had to perform forty years afterwards, by desire of his friends, when I had to convey him to the lunatic asylum, Morningside, Edinburgh, where he, a few months after, died, leaving a numerous family. In the new St. Paul's Chapel a very handsome mural tablet has been erected to his memory.

At the conclusion of my apprenticeship I went to Edinburgh, and ultimately I got a very comfortable appointment in the General Register House (Sasine Office Department) under Sir Robert Dundas, Bart., and Archibald Wishart, Esq., W. S., where I remained until 1829. During my long residence in Edinburgh there occurred many public events, which I will briefly refer to as they come to my recollection, without much attention to chronological order.

The first notable event I remember was the Musical Festival, at which Mori, Dragonetti, the Lindsays, and Harper, were the chief instrumentalists, and Braham, and Miss Stephens, the leading solo vocalists. I heard the Oratorio of "The

Messiah" in the Outer Parliament House, and its effect upon me, unaccustomed as I was to classical music on a large scale, was little short of overwhelming. Braham was at that time understood to be a Jew, and my astonishment, therefore, to hear him sing "I know that my Redeemer liveth," may be easily imagined.

Next came the great fire, which many bigoted people attributed to the desecration committed at the Festival aforesaid, by the mingling of sacred with profane objects, and had the Parliament House been destroyed, as it at one time promised to be, many more would have looked upon it as a retributive judgment. It escaped, however, while around was havoc and devastation. For three entire days we did no manner of business, but moved about from point to point, from the Canongate and Cowgate, to the High Street and the Lawnmarket, beholding pile after pile of blazing six story to twelve story houses fall prostrate to the ground. The greatest fall of all, as a spectacle at least, was that of the Tron Church steeple, the upper portion of which was built of wood. It for a long time retained its form as a mass

of flaming charcoal, having previously showered melted lead on the heads of too venturesome firemen; but at last a clang was heard, it was the last expiring note of the Tron bell, and down came the whole burning fabric into the space between the North and South Bridges, at one corner of which I stood prepared for the run which, I need not say, was general, on the first glimpse of the weather-cock descending from his perch.

By and bye there burst upon the town the Burke and Hare discoveries, which met with small credence at first, from the almost incredible nature of the facts, darkly hinted at in the mysterious columns of the *Caledonian Mercury*, then edited by Dr. Brown. As paper after paper appeared (and the run upon it was tremendous) the curtain gradually rose upon this "Chamber of Horrors." One Sunday morning early, I found myself boring my way through a dense crowd in the wake of an excited Irishman, whom no obstacle would stop, at the mouth of a narrow close in the West Bow, which led through a dark entry into a meanly furnished apartment on the ground. What



I saw there might have passed without notice, had not the "Charlie" in charge, pointing to a truss of straw on a sort of trestle bed, quietly observed—"It was there the woman Docherty was murdered, and that is the pot with some of the potatoes still remaining over the supper the three partook of, Docherty, Burke and Macdougall." There also lay the dead woman's boots and the remainder of her clothes, taken from her when the body was sacked for conveyance to Dr. Knox's dissecting room.

It was this subject which led to the discovery of the other murders, sixteen (I think) in all. After leaving Burke's, I went across to a stable in an adjoining close, which had been converted into, and kept by Hare, as a receptacle for night lodgers of the most miserable sort, in connection with the more operative establishment over the way. There was a double row of stalls, with channel in the middle—altogether a humiliating sight, viewed merely in relation to the destitution it indicated. What followed is matter of history—the trial of Burke, Macdougall, and Hare—the conviction of Burke, and his subsequent execution.



At the latter I was present in the close vicinity of the scaffold at the top of Bank Street, my friend, Wm. Miller and I, having taken up our position there at seven in the morning. During the hour that intervened the pressure of the enormous crowd was, in all directions, fearful. The tops of the houses in the vicinity were quite covered, and one man in a white great-coat, who clung to a chimney, made himself eminently conspicuous by his bawling out in a stentorian voice, "Hang Knox! hang Knox!" each time he did so, the populace cheering in token of approbation. Altogether the noise was appalling, and the instant Burke's head became visible above the steps which led to the scaffold, the mob surged violently in the direction of it, uttering such cries as no pen can describe. In vain the presiding Baillie (Cleghorn), a tall slender man, stretched forth his hand in a deprecating manner—the uproar and commotion seemed steadily to increase, when the priest, fearing perhaps for his own safety, caused the culprit without further preliminary to mount the drop, and to receive from the executioner the white handker-

chief as a signal, while the night-cap was hastily drawn over his eyes. I had my attention anxiously directed to him at this moment, and his look of frightened impatience, during the very short time he remained on the scaffold, I shall never forget. Before I could count five, he absolutely threw from him the signal, and down he went amid a hurricane of cheers, the other occupants of the scaffold scuttling off with a precipitancy which caused shouts of untimely laughter. So ended a drama but rarely paralleled in the world's history.

Allowing my memory to go back from this period in quest of *notabilia*, there occurs to my recollection a public incident in which Sir Walter Scott figured as a prominent actor. It was the inbringing to Edinburgh Castle of Mons Meg, after, it is needless here to say, how long an absence. As a piece of ordnance, although it is chiefly remarkable for the clumsiness of its construction, it has still such a grip on the ancient history of Scotland as to entitle it to the place it is now destined to hold for a few ages more to come among its warlike antiquities. Its military escort up Leith Walk was a sight worth seeing,

but its reception on the Half-Moon Battery by Sir Walter Scott at the head of the authorities in fullest panoply, was described at the time (for I was not there to see) as the most imposing part of the ceremony.

Much about this time, and including a scope of from eight to ten years, say 1820 to 1830, the daily parade we had to make in the Parliament House (Outer House) of the Court of Session, embraced sights which will cling to my memory with a tenacity, mostly due to the celebrity and eminence of the *dramatis personæ*, members of the Bench and Bar, as cannot but throw other metropolitan reminiscences into the shade.

On the Bench at that time were Chas. Hope, *President*, David Boyle, *Justice Clerk*, Lords Gillies, Alloway, Pitmilley, Hermand, etc.; and at the Bar, \*Crane-stoun, \*John Clerk, \*Jeffrey, \*Cockburn, Lockhart, and Skene, \*Moncrieff, \*Hope, \*Pat Robertson, etc. Those marked \* being after various intervals promoted to the Bench. Memoirs of that period by Lord Cockburn and others are referred to for the racy details of what is destined to hold a lasting place in the forensic history of the Modern Athens,

Of John Clerk (afterwards Lord Eldin), of whose odd appearance for a member of the Bar I have a vivid recollection, there were always in circulation, in my time, a variety of anecdotes and epigrams attributed to him.

On one of his fellows, as Junior Lord Ordinary, assuming the title of Lord Cringletie, the following appeared—

Necessity and Cringletie agree to a tittle,  
Necessity has no law—and Cringletie has little.

Others not so quotable are in Parliament House circulation to this day.

